Buchbesprechung

Invited book review: Verhulst, J. T. (2000): **Les *Colias* du Globe. Monograph of the Genus *Colias*** [2 volumes: Texte — text and Planches — plates]. — Keltern (Goecke & Evers), pp. 1–262 (text volume), pp. 265–308 (plates volume with 183 colour plates). Large (folio) format 34.5 cm × 24.5 cm, hard bound. Price: Euro 225.00, DM 440,—, £ 150.00. Text and lay-out by J. Verhulst, illustrations by T. Frankenbach and J. Verhulst, English translation by R. Leestmans, preface by P. François, genital drawings by M. Taymans, edited by E. Benton and R. Leestmans, produced by T. Frankenbach. ISBN 3-931374-15-7. (Available in U.K. from Hillside Books, Canterbury, Kent, U.K., ISBN 1-903237-03-3.)

Those of us who take an interest in the complexities of the beautiful *Colias* butterflies have looked forward to having a monographic treatment at hand, a first of its kind and one sorely needed at that; for the available information, until now, was either hoplessly outdated or scattered in a seemingly ever-increasing number of journals. This was expected to be an update of the numerous illuminating papers on the subject produced by Verhulst over the years, we believed, and one with a somewhat more uniform quality to it, we hoped. A monograph drawing extensively on the field experiences of Verhulst, glimpses of which have been variously presented in the past. At last a book entirely dedicated to the study of the *Colias*! Perhaps we expected too much ...

However, the general collector or amateur (who has little or no interest in classification and nomenclature), or someone only superficially interested in the genus, should find this nicely produced book extremely useful, especially the reputedly unsurpassed coverage of the plates, if they live up to expectations when they become available.

It is, perhaps, symptomatic that this long awaited book on the ever-increasingly popular *Colias* butterflies starts out with a set of disinformation; the publication date is stated to be August 2000 but the book was delayed several times (my copy of the text volume was received Oct. 19th). The plate volume also has been delayed. The illustration copyright is stated to be by Frankenbach & Verhulst, but are the nice front and back cover photographs not by T. Nygaard-Christensen? The extremely partial English translation is by Leestmans, but I hesitate to apply the term "translation". The editing is by Benton & Leestmans. Editing? Hardly! And the genital figures are so blurred and inaccurate to be of no purpose whatever. Here the English version of the text is considered.

This monograph pretends to be something that it is not, namely authoritative. It is monographic merely in the sense that it deals with a single genus, but it hardly lives up to the expectations that one rightfully might have for a modern monographic treatment. A nice book but a disappointing monograph. The author has apparently attempted to cater to the interests of amateurs and specialists alike, but has accomplished neither. Had it been somewhat less ambitiously produced and presented as a work of love for, and genuine fascination of, the intriguing *Colias;* had it been advertised as the ramblings of a dedicated amateur and an expert field man; had he not attempted to classify *everything,* however, things might have been very different as would indeed this review. It is a fact that one experiences great difficulties in retaining a fairly objective view of Verhulst's *magnum opus;* for this is a very personal and certainly untraditional book impregnated throughout with the author's own ideas of what be considered and what should not, i.e., of what is right and what is wrong in lepidopterology — according to Verhulst! I dare say that he has, over the years, developed his own concept of what lepidopterology really is about, indeed his own set of personal and exceptional criteria for "systematics", and they are not objective. Here he is on very shaky ground indeed, for in his distraction he utterly fails to adhere to the general rules laid down.

It may to some extent be unfair to sum up the book in terms such as amateurish, since it bears witness of a very enthusiastic effort and certainly also has its points and merits. Readers may still find it a dilligently dilettantic diffusion to be discommended, simply because it is evident that the author remains pretty much ignorant of general taxonomic principles. He does not distinguish between available names and unavailable names and appears not to know the meaning of the terms synonym and homonym. All of the available species-group names that he dislikes for one reason or another are simply called "forms" and not a word of explanation is offered. There are far too many examples of this sort. In this way he confuses the infrasubspecific *C. cocandica tatarica* form "viridis" Bang-Haas from NW Kunlun with the available *viridis* Bollow from the Nan Shan ranges. Similarly, he ignores the available *tatarica* B.-H. By placing it as a "form" he may think that taxon is "deleted" and forgotten, but it is not. Convenient methods, perhaps, but a far cry from representing any form of progress. Fortunately, nomenclature is not operable in such casually subjective ways! In short, this *Colias* monograph would have benefitted immensely from a much more strict and rigid editing, from a thoroughly critical refereeing and not least by a proper English translation of all of the original French text (and not only an outlandish piecemeal transcript). It is a premature publication but we can perhaps look forward to a revised 2nd edition?

The introductory parts provide illuminating insight into Verhulst's definition of entomology: "Bang-Haas ... did not practise *real entomological activity* ... [because he] *did not participate in entomological excursions and collecting*." Or that: "In our view, a *revision* of the *Colias* genus can only be achieved correctly *if it is based on personal observations in nature*" (italics mine). So much for systematics, phylogeny, cladistics, molecular biology, nomenclature, curation of reference material and good, old-fashioned typological methods (which still form the platform on which *Colias* classification remains — despite certain progress in other fields); so much for anatomy and biometrical analyses, and so much for genital dissection (which Verhulst repeatedly informs us has no merit in this particular genus); so "we shall not develop this aspect" [sic]. But how on earth can he know if he never has looked at the structures? Some of us tend to disagree! Instead he uses quite different criteria for his dubious disposition of the *Colias*. "The proposed classification is based not solely on dead specimens, *but most of all on my own field notes which that* [sic] *provided me with lots of data on the status of many taxa*" (italics mine). This may be the reason for the frequently faulty disposition of various subspecies, in particular those of *C. palaeno, C. hecla, C. nastes, C. staudingeri* and *C. wiskotti,* the treatment and arrangement of which remain unacceptable.

Verhulst suffers greatly from what may be dubbed *"enumeratiomania"* for the lack of a better term. In other words he is a genuine "listoholic" to the extent that he brings lists upon lists upon lists. All of this might have been palatable, if only marginally so, had they been of any evident merit. There is a four-page list of "interesting localities", with or without geographical coordinates. Many of these localities have no text relevance and some are erroneously rendered. What exactly is the author attempting to convey here? There is a nine-page(!) "systematic list" where the species sequence has become disjointed and where much of the space is taken up by a most incomplete enumeration of wholly superfluous, unavailable infrasubspecific names. There are lists of "species observed by the author in the field" and of "species *not* observed [by the author in the field]" followed by lists and lists of

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species occurring in this region and that region, of "the author's own collecting and expeditions since the early 1960's", even one with details of "since 1978 my *Colias* expeditions concerns [sic] the following areas." Also there is an incomplete list of abbreviations as well as a concluding taxonomic list with page references; but there is no alphabetical index of names! Altogether these wondrous lists fill 18 pages. There is a most incomplete bibliography which in the so-called English text is dubbed "Selected References" and it is certainly selective. It is not, however, a list of the references actually cited in the text, but a rather haphazard 24 page compilation of various books and articles. One may look in vain for some of the titles referred to in the text, the list falls short of being even a rudimentarily comprehensive *Colias* bibliography, and many of the references are incorrectly cited.

A major part of the book is taken up by citations from allegedly original descriptions of taxa. But not all are the original descriptions they purport to be, and they also include misquotes and what appear to be "selected abstracts", so they may be highly misleading. Some Latin diagnoses are incompletely rendered, other passages are left unfinished, hanging in midair. The citation alleged to be the original description of the alpine *C. palaeno europomene,* for instance, is in fact a general description of *europome* which might not be so misleading in itself were it not for the fact that it causes Verhulst to date the taxon wrongly and also shift the type locality from Alpine Switzerland to Pommeranian lowlands near the Baltic coast! Even worse, none of these original descriptions, whether alleged or real, are actually referred to the author who wrote them in the first place. It thus becomes impossible for the reader to discern what exactly is from the hand of Verhulst and what is quoted from the literature. In this way practically all of Verhulst's literature citations become plagiarism, for they are not provided with the proper references nor are they placed within citation marks. As regards Verhulst's concept of type localities one may rightfully say that his renderings of such are inaccurate at the best, also that many of them are examples of "citation inbreeding" in having been copied indiscriminately from publications that may be encumbered with errors. The type locality of the nominate *C. staudingeri,* for example, is stated to be in the Transalai range, roughly 1000 km (as the crow flies) removed from East (Chinese) Tian Shan where Alphéraky actually discovered the taxon! It is not surprising that some of Verhulst's subspecies are a confused lot.

If the superfluous lists, the infrasubspecific taxa with their equally superfluous annotations, and not least the perhaps unintentionally plagiarised parts were to be removed, however, there is very little actual lepidopterological matter contained in the book which is not previously published. What remain are some odd bits of field observation, some of which are mere snippets and mostly of variable standard and merit. Some of them are amusing rather than illuminating, and one may search in vain for observations of a truly novel nature that actually contribute to the knowledge of the intriguing *Colias*. A few examples will serve. The unsuspecting reader learns that *Colias* "cohabit", but the act of cohabiting is that of living together without being married! That "females are peculiar". Yes, indeed! Or that "females are easier to capture because they are less irritable"! Of this or that species we are informed that it "dwells rapidly in the forest" and that the female "flies in leaps"! He gives us brief statements on how two similar species may be "separed" [sic]! Also that he actually "collected a population". A case of instant extinction? To top it off, Verhulst apparently experienced problems in referring to and not least fixing the position of the so-called sex-brand to the *Colias* male **hindwing**. He presents various directions and placements for the structure until one is apt to believe that it really moves about in his specimens. At one point he even locates it "under the costa of the **forewing**" [sic]. It is by such wondrous and/or inexplicable statements that one tends to lose one's desired objectivity and I believe we may all agree that the outlandish English of the text lends itself to satirical comments — to say the least! A critical editor could have prevented much of this from persisting in the final version.

In preparing these notes the reviewer briefly skimmed the monograph for obvious and glaring inaccuracies. This process proved to be so exasperatingly depressing that I eventually gave it up before the end was reached, but not before I had noted some 48 cases of type localities erroneously rendered, 37 cases of type localities incompletely quoted and thus misleading, 11 cases of names of taxa wrongly applied or wrongly treated, 19 cases of erroneous quotation of original descriptions, 6 cases of erroneous determination, 7 cases of missing references to original descriptions, 4 names of authors misquoted, 7 cases of use of invalid names as if they were valid, 4 names of taxa misspelled, and quite a number of overlooked available names! The author has produced numerous new synonyms, perhaps inadvertently or unwittingly; but such *de facto* changes of status for available species-group names are nowhere actually stated for the taxa so manipulated.

Is this review an overly gross and grim evaluation of the *magnum opus* of an obviously well-meaning and certainly dedicated amateur who is moreover a rather well-known field man of considerable expertise? I for one do not think so, for the book speaks adequately for itself. And the Verhulst "systematics" (which retains the synonymic subgeneric names by Berger) remains deeply suspect and should not be taken for more than it is, namely: a sketchy outline and one not really updated at that (the Petersen subgenera have been overlooked). I can not recommend this book, and no one ought to attempt to use it for actually rearranging their collections of *Colias* butterflies. To the sceptics that may exist I present this final quotation, an example that nicely sums it all up (p. 75): "The hitherto to *Colias nastes* Boisduval 1832 placed subspecies *werdandi* Zetterstedt 1840 from Scandinavia and *dezhnevi* Korshunov & Gorbunov 1995 (= *sibirica* Kurentzov 1970), are subspecies of *Colias tyche zemblica* Verity 1911 is synonymous to *werdandi*" [sic!].

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